

Happiness and well-being

Language

Idioms for happiness and unhappiness; making plans

Level

Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2–B1 and above)

Comment

This eLesson looks at the nature of happiness and whether it is something that governments can or should try to cultivate. The springboard for the text is the British Prime Minister's recent announcement about well-being and government policies. For lower level groups, the vocabulary task and the optional grammar focus could be left out.

How to use the lesson

- 1 Draw a big smiley face on the board and ask the students to turn to each other and to give one another a big happy smile, if you think your learners will respond positively to this! Students complete exercise 1, first alone and then they compare answers in pairs. Don't worry if students find their happiness hard to measure – this links with the topic of the reading!
- 2 Students do exercise 2 in pairs, without yet reading the text. Take feedback on their ideas, perhaps writing up some good examples on the board. Then write the following questions on the board for further discussion (or leave this until after the reading tasks). These questions are intended to show the complexity of happiness:
 - 1 *Does happiness mean different things, depending on your age or sex? What might make the following people happy in the (a) short-term and (b) long-term: an 8-year-old boy or girl; a teenager; a 20–30 year old; a middle-aged person; a retired person?*
 - 2 *Who is responsible for making you happy – your parents, yourself, the state?*
- 3 Try to elicit synonyms for *happiness*, eg *contentment*, *cheerfulness*. Write up the word *well-being* and clarify it. Tell students they are going to find out what one government thinks about happiness. Students complete exercise 3. Take swift class feedback.
- 4 In exercise 4, you could tell less confident readers which order to answer the questions in, so that the answers appear consecutively in the text eg 1, 7, 5, etc. Allow students time to discuss answers in pairs, before whole class feedback.
- 5 Exercise 5 is an oral fluency activity. Give students two minutes to read the points and to make notes. Give a time limit for the discussion, to signal to your students that you expect them to talk freely on the topics, then put students in threes. Monitor and note any points of interest, to raise later if appropriate. Alternatively, you could cut up the discussion points, feeding in one point at a time to each group as they finish. This adds an element of surprise and tends to promote more talking.
- 6 Exercise 6 focuses on commonly used idioms related to (un)happiness. See if students can categorise them, either alone or in pairs. For fun, you could ask them to choose one line and expand it into a dialogue, working in pairs. Do an example together as a class, to motivate students and clarify the task.

- 7 A mini grammar focus for this text (for intermediate and above students, where appropriate) might be a focus on the noun + verb *be* + *to* + *infinitive* structure to talk formally about future plans. This structure is often found in oral or written news reports about public events or people. Put the following example on the board, eliciting form and meaning: *the first results are to come out in 2012*. Ask students to locate the other example in paragraph 3: (*the British public are to be asked on a regular basis ...*). To give practice, try and use local or world contexts or events, eg for local events: *the mayor is to visit in May; a new bus station is to be built next year*. For global events: *Obama is to meet with officials in Haiti*, etc. You could use prompts, eg *mayor – visit – May*, or let students invent their own examples. These could be expanded on to make mini news articles or reports.

Answer key

1 Students' own answers.

2 Students' own answers.

3

- 1 They hope to start measuring happiness, in an attempt to improve people's well-being.
- 2 Usually people's well-being is measured simply by the economy.
- 3 Difficult, because measuring happiness is a very complicated task.

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- 1 David Cameron, the British Prime Minister
- 2 Greek philosophers such as Aristotle
- 3 the Bhutanese government
- 4 the dogs
- 5 some of the British people
- 6 the Bhutanese government
- 7 David Cameron

5 Students' own answers

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Happiness: 1, 4, 5, 7

Unhappiness: 2, 3, 6

Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/nov/15/happiness-index-wellbeing-nef>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11833241> (includes a video of Cameron speaking)

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article723616.ece>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8703690.stm (about Bhutan's plans for a happiness centre)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/19/AR2010031903939.html> (about Bhutan's happiness index)

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>